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ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of group methods in adoption practice. Already in use during intake and post-placement, group methods are now proving relevant in the adoptive study of applicant parents and in the improved knowledge and effectiveness of service delivery. In the form of a seminar for applicants, this adoptive study explores the following: (1) emotions; (2) purposes of the adoptive study; (3) the adoption worker; and (4) adoptive parents as distinguished from natural parents. Adoptive study serves a dual purpose: (1) preparation for adoptive parenthood; and (2) evaluation of applicant parents. An appropriate vehicle for attitudinal change, the group discussion method provides an opportunity for applicants to discuss their attitudes with other adoptive parents. The report includes an outline of the mechanics of group study and an assessment of the relative merits of an individual versus group approach. (Author/LAA)

ED 082084

A Seminar On

THE GROUP ADOPTIVE STUDY

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I. Introduction:

The use of group methods in adoption practice is not new. Adoption agencies have been seeing couples at intake in groups. Also, many adoption agencies use groups in the post-placement period of service. Recently agencies have begun to use group methods in the adoptive study.

The use of group methods in the adoptive study is not a panacea. It is only one of several methods available to adoption workers. Through this method perhaps we can improve our knowledge and effectiveness in service delivery.

This seminar will focus primarily on the couple wishing to adopt a child of the same racial background as theirs. Much of the material, however, will be adaptable to other situations, such as couples adopting children of other races and children with special needs, single parents adopting, etc.

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II. The Adoptive Applicant

Through the method of brainstorming, list as many adjectives you can think of which describe the feelings or emotions the adoptive applicants are experiencing as they approach a social agency to begin an adoptive study.

Rules for brainstorming:

1.) List all ideas.
2.) Do not discuss.
3.) Do not judge.
4.) Repetition is O.K.

Reach concensus in your group on the five adjectives to which you would give the highest priority as describing the feelings or emotions the adoptive applicants are experiencing as they begin an adoptive study.

III. The Adoption Worker

Through the method of brainstorming, list as many phrases as you can think of which describe what you perceive in the term "the adoption worker." (Careful now, you're talking about yourself!)

Reach concensus in your group on the five phrases to which you would give the highest priority as being most descriptive of "the adoption worker " either from your perspective or that of the adoptive applicant.

Suggested reading from bibliography:

Braden, Josephine, "Adoption in a Changing World" etc.

IV. The Purpose of the Adoptive Study from the Adoptive Applicant's Perspective:

A graduate student who was a prospective adoptive applicant was asked by his social worker what he thought would happen in the adoptive study. He responded, "It's like an exam; however, for this exam one cannot study."

Recently a prospective adoptive couple wrote to an advice column in a newspaper in St. Louis. The couple questioned why the waiting period was so long in many adoption agencies following an initial application to the agency and prior to receiving a child. In addition to the reasons for the diminishing supply of infants available for adoption, the writer of the column stated that it also takes agencies considerable time to compile their information and complete the investigation of adoptive applicants.

What do adoptive applicants perceive as the purpose of the adoptive study? Have you recently asked the applicants with whom you have been working?

Through the method of brainstorming, list what you think applicants feel is the purpose of the adoptive study. Reach agreement in your group on the three reasons you feel applicants most generally would state is the purpose of the adoptive study.

V. The Traditional View of the Purpose of tne Adoptive Study

Ripple (1968) completed a follow-up study of children adopted through a private Illinois adoption agency. The sample included 160 children seven through ten years of age who had been placed for adoption during the years 1955-1958. The research attempted to relate the outcome of these adoptions to various psychological criteria in the adoptive parents at the time of placement.

Despite the limitations of this research, the findings showed that it is extremely difficult to predict and select prospective adoptive parents on the basis of an evaluative approach in the adoptive study. The findings of the study revealed that adoptive applicants present themselves in a favorable light to adoption workers who are perceived as being concerned with the evaluation and scrutiny of them as applicants. The adoptive applicants would not readily admit to themselves or reveal to the agency their weaknesses or their doubts about adoption. The results revealed that social workers were knowledgeable about the elements of "bad parenting" and had considerable skill in identifying these elements, but the assessment of functioning apart from rather gross pathology was very difficult if not impossible. Such assessment, as occurred in evaluative adoptive studies, called for far too many assessments of inferential material. The results of this research would indicate that the approach to the adoptive study as being a period of scrutiny and evaluation is not a helpful or fruitful approach.

Suggested reading from bibliography:

Ripple, L. "A Follow-up Study of Adopted Children." etc.

VI. Adoptive Parenthood as Distinguished from Natural Parenthood

There is much in common between being parents of a child to which a couple has given birth as well as being parents to a child through adoption. The parents must grow with the child through the various physical, psychological and social stages of development in either situation of parenthood.

Research indicates there are several variables with which adoptive parents must cope that do not affect parents who have given birth to a child. These are:

1) attitude toward infertility
2) " " unmarried parents
3) " " telling child about adoption

1) Kirk (1964) and Andrews (1970) found that individuals reacted to their infertility with intense disappointment and feelings of depression and helplessness. Lawder, et al. (1969) found a relationship between the ability to discuss infertility on the part of both husbands and wives and later outcome in the adoptive placement. Schwartz (1966) found that the adoptive mothers of boys eight to eleven years of age who had been placed as infants had not as yet worked through their conflicts and feelings regarding infertility.

2) Several studies (Schwartz, 1966; Lawder et. al., 1969) relate difficulties in adoptive placements, six or more years following placement, to the adoptive parents' inability to accept adoption, the latter including the concept of illegitimacy. Schwartz (1966) reports:

> . . . conflicts regarding adopted status (in his sample of preadolescent boys) are intensified as a result of parental anxieties concerning adoption, and the apparently inevitable problem of coping with the original rejection of the natural parents. (p. 2519)

3) Jaffee and Fanshel (1969) found a weak relationship between outcome of adoption and how the adoptee was informed of his adopted status in their study of parents who had adopted children. Lawder, et al. (1969) found a high correlation between a couple's acceptance of the adoptive role and the communication of adoption to the child. Lawder felt that the research data suggested that communication of the fact of adoption is problematic for many adoptive couples, including those who do well in other areas of parental functioning.

Suggested reading from bibliography:

Andrews, R. "Adoption and the Resolution of Infertility." etc.
Lawder, E. et al. A Followup Study of Adoptions etc.

VII. A Suggested View of the Purpose of the Adoptive Study

The purpose of the adoptive study is conceptualized as twofold. The primary purpose is preparation for adoptive parenthood. Adoptive parenthood is viewed as different from natural parenthood. The difference between adoptive and natural parenthood centers in the three variables which have been cited from evaluative research in adoption as critical to the success or failure of adoptions; namely, the adoptive couple's attitude toward their infertility, their attitude toward unmarried parents and attitude toward telling a child about adoption. The preparatory aspect of the adoptive study occurs as the adoptive couples are encouraged to develop awareness of their attitudes in these critical areas. Where it is appropriate, the preparatory aspect of the adoptive study should afford the adoptive couple the opportunity to make changes in their attitudes. Also, the adoptive study serves as a period of preparation for parenthood through enabling the adoptive applicants to develop an understanding of the physical, social and psychological growth and development of a child.

The secondary purpose of the adoptive study is evaluation fpr parenthood. Although there is a trend in adoption practice to deny the need for the evaluative aspect of the adoptive study, it is difficult to deny that evaluation is a component of this aspect of the adoption process. The social, cultural and legal setting in which an adoption agency operates involves the relinquishment of children for adoption through the court. The Court in turn transfers the custody and responsibility for the child to a social agency which has designated as its function or service goal the placement of children in need of adoption with couples requesting such children. Unless the social agency handles its task by merely placing the names of available infants and couples requesting to adopt on lists and pairing each off as they reach the top of the list, some evaluative component immediately is involved.

Although the selection of adoptive applicants for the placement of children of necessity involves the element of evaluation by the adoption agency, this need not become the major focus of the study. Research on the outcome of adoptive placements (Kadushin, 1966; Ripple, 1968; Lawder et al. 1969; Hoopes et al., 1970) would support the necessity of retaining the evaluative element in the adoptive study which may be shared jointly by the worker and the adoptive applicant. The findings indicate that adoption may present a hazard or stress factor in the social and psychological development of children. Such research, while certainly emphasizing the importance of preparing adoptive couples to deal with the stress factors inherent in adoption, does not negate the necessity that an agency may be faced with evaluating an applicant's readiness and capacity to cope with such stress.

Suggested reading from bibliography:

Kaduschin, A. "Adoptive Parenthood: A Hazardous Adventure?" etc.

VIII. The Concept of Attitudes

Katz and Stotland define the concept of attitude as follows:

> (An attitude is) an individual's tendency or predisposition to evaluate an object or symbol of that object in a certain way. Evaluation is the attribution of qualities which can be placed along a dimension of desirability and undesirability, or "goodness-badness." Evaluation in this sense always includes cognitive and affective elements . . . Judgments which are purely cognitive would not fall into the category of attitudes.
>
> From: D. Katz & E. Stotland. A Preliminary Statement to a Theory of Attitude Structure and Change. In S. Koch (Ed.) Psychology: A Study of a Science. Vol. 3. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), pp. 428-429.

Katz and Stotland (1959) distinguish among three components in the structure of attitudes: the affective, cognitive and behavorial components. The affective component is most closely related to the evaluation of an object or symbol of the object, however, some elements of cognition are necessary to recognize and relate to the object. The cognitive component is conceptualized as a person's factual knowledge. The behavioral component is the person's behavioral response to the object. Individual attitudes are organized into larger structures called value systems.

Zimbardo and Ebbesen in a review of recent theorists state:

> . . . . attitudes have generally been regarded as either mental readiness or implicit predispositions which exert some general and consistent influence on a fairly large class of evaluative responses. These responses are usually directed toward some object, person or group. In addition, attitudes are seen as enduring predispositions, but ones which are learned rather than innate.
>
> From: P. Zimbardo & E. Ebbesen. Influencing Attitudes and Changing Behavior. (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley, 1969), p.6.

IX. A Theoretical Framework for Adoptive Study Groups

Research in group dynamics shows that the group discussion method is a more appropriate vehicle for attitudinal change than other methods of persuasion. (References available from seminar leader.)

In the group method of the adoptive study, the applicants have the opportunity to discuss their attitudes in the presence of other adoptive couples. This is thought to enable the adoptive couples to compare the appropriateness of their attitudes with other couples. The research on group dynamics shows the effect of the group method on attitudinal change; namely, that greater attitudinal change occurs with group discussion than other forms of persuasion. The question can be raised as to the process which occurs to account for this phenomenon. Social comparison theory may provide one approach to this question. Festinger (1950, 1954) postulated that there exists in the human organism a drive to evaluate one's opinions, attitudes and beliefs. A continuum of physical reality can be set up as the basis of which people evaluate the validity of their opinions, attitudes and beliefs. Where there is a high degree of dependence upon physical reality for the subjective validity of one's attitudes, the dependence upon other people for the confidence one has in these attitudes is very low. For example, the question of whether or not an object is fragile can be resolved by testing if the object breaks when it is dropped. At the other end of the continuum where dependence upon physical reality is low, the subjective validity of an attitude depends upon whether of not other people share one's attitude and feel the same way. If there are others who share the attitude, the individual's attitude to him is valid.

To the extent that objective, non-social means are not available, people evaluate their attitudes by comparison with the attitudes of others. Social comparison theory has been criticized by Deutsch and Krauss (1965) in that the theory assumes that individuals have a need to have an objective picture of their attitudes. The criticism is made that the opposite may also be true. Individuals may not want to have an accurate or objective picture of their attitudes, especially where an attitude has little social relevance. This may occur in situations where one's attitude does not affect the way others react to one even though the attitude may be personally important.

The purpose of the adoptive study as preparation for adoptive parenthood requires adoptive applicants to examine their attitudes toward adoption. There exists no objective, non-social means by which adoptive applicants can evaluate the appropriateness of their attitudes toward various aspects of adoption. Thus, in the group method of the adoptive study other applicants in the group may serve as a means of comparison. In the individual method of the adoptive study (i.e. an adoptive couple and the social worker), the base for comparison is much smaller and the role of the worker may detract from being a source of comparison for the applicants.

Research in social comparison theory states that individuals prefer to compare themselves with similar others. (Festinger, 1954). Thus, a person does not tend to evaluate his attitudes by comparison with others who are too divergent from himself. The adoptive study group provides adoptive couples an opportunity to compare their attitudes on adoption with other couples in a similar situation.

IX. (continued)

The role of the social worker as the group leader in the adoptive group study serves to reinforce those in the group who represent an appropriate or positive position on the continuum of attitudes. Also, the social worker's credibility, by virtue of his position in the agency and as leader of the group, strengthens his position as the reinforcer of the group members representing a positive position on the continuum of attitudes. Studies have been done by Hovland, Janis, Kelley and Kelman on the subject of the credibility of the communicator in relation to subjects' reception of communication. (References available from seminar leader)

Suggested reading from bibliography:

Festinger, L. "Informal Social Communication." etc.
Festinger, L. "A Theory of Social Comparison Processes." etc.

X. Advantages and Disadvantages of the Individual* and Group Methods of the Adoptive Study

1. In the group setting an individual or couple may be reluctant to share highly personal material such as in the area of infertility.

2. The group setting enables adoptive couples to meet and relate to other couples who are in a similar situation of needing to adopt. Kirk (1964) refers to this as a "shared fate".

3. The presence of other adoptive couples in the group setting may intensify feelings of competition.

4. The number of participants in the group setting cuts down on the amount of communication which can occur on the part of any one person.

5. The presence of other individuals in the group setting enables a person to not have to actively participate in communication but yet be a part of the process and to profit from the group process.

6. It may be more difficult to work with a specific individual and his particular needs in the group setting.

7. An individual may be reluctant to share a divergent opinion or attitude in the group setting.

* The term "individual method" of the adoptive study refers to an adoptive couple meeting with a social worker in a triadic relationship. It does not necessarily refer to individual or one to one interviews although this method of interviewing may be used in this form of the adoptive study.

XI. The Mechanics of the Adoptive Group Study

A. At intake applicants are seen individually for an initial interview.

B. Two forms of adoptive group study.

1. Extended group study.

2. Marathon group study.

C. Size of group.

D. Leadership of group.

E. Physical arrangements or setting.

1. Visability of participants to each other.

2. Name place cards or name tags.

XI. (Continued)

F. Process in the group.

1. Cognitive material

2. Affective material

3. Behavorial aspects

H. Content in the group sessions.

1. Attitude toward infertility

2. Attitude toward unmarried parents

3. Attitude toward telling child about adoption.

I. Recording of data from group sessions.

1. Brief summary of impressions

2. Use of autobiography.

J. Individual sessions with applicant couples following adoptive study.

XII. A Research Study: A Comparison of the Group and Individual Methods of the Adoptive Study in Relation to Attitudinal Change.

The purpose of the research was to compare two methods of the adoptive study, the group and individual methods, in relation to differences in attitudinal change which were hypothesized to occur. Attitudinal change was measured in three areas shown by previous research in adoption to be critically related to the outcome of adoptive placements. These were: 1) attitude toward infertility; 2) attitude toward unmarried parents; and 3) attitude toward telling a child about adoption. Attitudinal change which occurs in the adoptive study was regarded as reflective of the primary purpose of the adoptive study; namely, preparation for adoptive parenthood.

The sample consisted of twenty-two prospective adoptive couples (44 individuals) who had applied to adopt healthy, Caucasian infants from a private sectarian adoption agency. Two social workers conducted the adoptive studies. Each social worker studied six couples through the individual method of the adoptive study and lead a group adoptive study of six couples.

The subjects were tested prior to and following the adoptive study for their attitudes toward infertility, unmarried parents and telling a child about adoption on a specially constructed form of the Semantic Differential. Additional indices were obtained on subjects' anxiety, dogmatism, general personality functioning and the perception of the adoptive study as preparation and evaluation.

Hypotheses were formulated that greater positive attitudinal change would occur in the group method as compared to the individual method of study on subjects' attitudes toward infertility, unmarried parents and telling a child about adoption. Additional questions to which the research was addressed were: Does an inverse relationship exist between adoptive applicants' perception of the adoptive study as evaluation and preparation; namely, the more subjects rate the same study as preparation, the less the same subjects will rate the same study as evaluation? Is there a relationship between subjects who perceived the adoptive study as preparation and amount and nature of attitudinal change which occurred?

The major hypotheses of the research were rejected. Greater attitudinal change on the three aforementioned attitudes did not occur in the group method as compared to the individual method. Significant changes in attitudes toward unmarried parents and telling a child about adoption were shown by subjects in both methods of the adoptive study. Interaction effects between worker and method occurred on attitude toward telling a child about adoption. Subjects tended to perceive the adoptive study as both preparation and evaluation rather than viewing the two concepts in an inverse relationship. The group method of the adoptive study was significantly perceived by subjects as preparation for adoptive parenthood.

Major conclusions drawn from the research were as follows: 1) The use of group methods in the adoption process appeared to differ from traditional groups because of the elements of evaluation, competition and the lack of cohesiveness in adoptive study groups. 2) Attitude toward infertility, while a critical variable in relation to the outcome of adoptive placements, is an area to which

XII. (Continued)

adoptive couples have difficulty relating. This may be due to the personal nature of the subject. 3) The group method of the adoptive study is an effective means for enabling the study to be a period of preparation for adoptive parenthood. 4) Personality variables such as personal adjustment, defensiveness and anxiety are not only important to clients' later functioning as adoptive parents but are also relevant to the process of the adoptive study.

Vernon R. Wiehe, Ph.D.

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Teaching Infant Care to Adopting Parents

HELEN COMINOS

COUPLES who are planning to adopt infants have responded enthusiastically to the instruction on infant care that is offered to them by the Lutheran Family and Children's Services of St. Louis. This voluntary agency arranged for sessions of instruction to adopting parents to overcome the uneasiness these couples felt when they attended classes with pregnant women. The instruction is handled by a registered nurse, a staff member of the Visiting Nurse Association of Greater St. Louis.

During three sessions, the nurse lectures on different aspects of caring for an infant. She covers four topics: (1) bathing, diapering, and dressing an infant; (2) formula preparation, bottle sterilization, and infant feeding; (3) purchasing food, clothing, and equipment; and (4) immunizations, vaccinations, and other health procedures. Educational pamphlets are made available.

The couples listen and watch the nurse bathe and dress a perky, responsive, 3-month-old infant. After the demonstration, the couples take turns diapering the baby. Those with less confidence bathe, diaper, and dress life-sized dolls.

The nurse discusses the use and value of the pacifier; she demonstrates how to take a baby's temperature; she tells parents not to worry about shoes for very young babies, since bare feet help develop the arches. She also tries to dispel commonly held superstitions and false beliefs about infants and their development. At one point, for example, she takes the baby around and lets the couples feel the fontanelle or "soft spot" on the top of his head, so that they can see for themselves that it is not as sensitive as the old wives' tales would suggest—although it should, of course, be handled with care.

The nurse gives the information and then allows time for questions and answers. Her warmth and spontaneity, as well as her sound, pedagogic approach, make for an atmosphere of genuine interest and enthusiasm to which practically all the couples respond.

The questionnaires that the couples returned to the agency after the course was finished showed that they had gained confidence and had obtained valuable information on infant care. Some comments were: "My husband found out infants are not as breakable as they appear." "Learning the symptoms of illnesses was of practical value to me." "My husband told me he learned a better way to fold a diaper to fit the baby." "The nurse brought up facts a parent will want to know even before the parent might think about them." "The baby's bath was particularly interesting to me; I was always afraid of losing him in all the soapy water. The nurse showed the proper way to hold the baby while bathing him."

We believe these sessions build up the couples' enthusiasm about becoming parents, heighten their expectations, and spark their excitement. Their experience during this period seems not unlike the pattern of natural parents awaiting the birth of their child. This is a frightening time for most couples as they wait for a baby to be selected for them. The infant care classes create both practical help and a morale booster for adopting couples during the difficult waiting period.

Couples planning to adopt children listen and watch as the nurse bathes and dresses an infant. Then they take turns handling the baby, or if they lack confidence, a life-sized doll.

MISS COMINOS *(B.A. and M.S.W., St. Louis University) is child welfare supervisor of the Lutheran Family and Children's Services of St. Louis, Mo.*

EVALUATION OF SEMINAR

Your evaluation of the seminar will be helpful to the group leader in receiving feedback on both the content and process of the seminar. Please respond openly to the questions; you need not sign the questionnaire.

1. My reaction to the content or material shared in the seminar was that it was . . .

   _____ not at all interesting
   _____ slightly interesting
   _____ moderately interesting
   _____ very interesting

2. I would rate the seminar as being helpful to me in my adoption practice as . . .

   _____ not at all helpful
   _____ slightly helpful
   _____ moderately helpful
   _____ a great deal helpful

3. What did you like best about the seminar?

4. If the seminar were to be held again tomorrow, what would you suggest be done differently to maximize the benefits of the seminar for the participants?

5. General comments: